

BIOTERRORISM:  
**SMALLPOX**

SOUTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROL

## TACTICS AGAINST TERRORISM: **SMALLPOX**

South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control  
Office of Public Health Preparedness



## **What is bioterrorism?**

Bioterrorism is the intentional use of bacteria, viruses, or natural toxins (poisons) as a weapon to kill, injure or produce disease in humans, animals or plants. Terrorists may use such an attack to create fear, disrupt the economy, or to get a response from the government.

## What is smallpox?

Smallpox is a deadly disease caused by a virus. It used to be common, but vaccinations have stopped the disease's spread. The World Health Organization declared in 1980 that the disease had been wiped out worldwide through an active vaccination program. The only way to prevent smallpox is by being vaccinated.

## How people get smallpox

### You can get smallpox in three ways:

- An infected person talks, coughs or sneezes near another person. It's not as contagious as measles or flu.
- Direct contact with infected bodily fluids, bedding or clothing
- The virus is intentionally put into the air.

Smallpox was wiped out in 1979. Only an act of biological terrorism could cause people to get sick from smallpox today.

## How smallpox can be used for terrorism

Terrorists can use smallpox as a weapon by putting the bacteria in the air. Since it spreads from person to person, it can make many people sick.

### Symptoms of smallpox

- High fever (101 to 104 degrees)
- Rash on the face, legs and arms that start as flat, red bumps then fill with a yellowy liquid (pus) and form scabs
- Feeling tired
- Head and body aches
- Vomiting

Symptoms appear within 17 days after being exposed to the smallpox virus. Typically, the infected person feels normal and does not spread the virus during this time. However, when a fever and rash begin to develop, you can spread the virus to other people. You will continue to spread the disease until all of the smallpox scabs on your body are gone.

## Treating smallpox

If there is a smallpox terrorism attack, get medical care immediately. Although there is no proven treatment for smallpox, doctors can help ease pain and fever by giving you medicine. Most people with smallpox get better. About 30 percent of people with the disease die. Many smallpox survivors have large permanent scars on their body, especially their face. Some become blind.

## The smallpox vaccine

The smallpox vaccine is given to people to stop them from getting smallpox. The vaccine does not contain the smallpox virus and it cannot give you smallpox. It is the best protection from smallpox. If you are exposed to smallpox, the vaccine might stop you from getting the disease or the disease might not be as severe.

The U.S. stopped giving smallpox vaccinations on a regular basis in 1972. The smallpox vaccine is not widely available to the general public. The only people who may get smallpox vaccinations today are scientists who work with smallpox, doctors and nurses, military personnel and other emergency responders.

### **You should not be vaccinated against smallpox if:**

- You get sick easily.
- You live with someone who gets sick easily.
- You are pregnant.
- You are breastfeeding.
- You are allergic to the vaccine.

Children under the age of 1 should not be vaccinated against smallpox, either.

## How to protect yourself and others

- Keep yourself and your children away from anyone who might have smallpox.
- If you have reason to believe you have been exposed to smallpox, stay away from other people and call your doctor or public health authorities immediately.

## What's being done to protect you

- The South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) keep constant watch for cases of smallpox. A single case of smallpox is treated as an emergency because many people can get sick. Doctors are required by law to report suspected and confirmed cases to their local health department immediately. DHEC and the CDC will cooperate with law enforcement to investigate its cause to help prevent others from getting the disease.
- The CDC has vaccine to help prevent smallpox. There is enough smallpox vaccine to protect everyone in the U.S.
- DHEC has developed a comprehensive smallpox emergency plan. The plan includes information for health care workers who would detect and treat the disease.
- DHEC and its health partners have vaccinated many hospital and public health workers.
- Your doctor can talk to experts at DHEC and the CDC about smallpox 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

## If there's a smallpox outbreak

- Public health officials will tell you what to do and where to go for care if you think you have smallpox. You will be given emergency health information through radio, TV and newspapers.
- If you have smallpox, you will be kept away from other people who could get sick from you. You will get medical care. You won't be able to go to work or other public places until you've recovered.
- DHEC and the CDC will make smallpox vaccine available to all residents of South Carolina if needed.

If there is a terrorist event using smallpox, local and state law enforcement and health agencies will provide you instructions for protecting yourself.

## Numbers to know

**For all emergencies:** 9-1-1

**SC DHEC** (during business hours): (803) 898-3432

**CDC:** (800) 232-4636

**Palmetto Poison Center:** (800) 222-1222

## For more information

### SC DHEC

[www.scdhec.gov](http://www.scdhec.gov)

[www.scdhec.gov/tat](http://www.scdhec.gov/tat) (*Tactics Against Terrorism*)

[www.scdhec.gov/health/disease/han/smallpox.htm](http://www.scdhec.gov/health/disease/han/smallpox.htm)

### CDC

[www.bt.cdc.gov](http://www.bt.cdc.gov)

[www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/smallpox](http://www.bt.cdc.gov/agent/smallpox)

### USDA

[www.fsis.usda.gov](http://www.fsis.usda.gov)

The phone numbers for reporting cases or possible cases of bioterrorism to your local health department and the DHEC Division of Acute Disease Epidemiology are available at: [www.scdhec.gov/administration/library/CR-009025.pdf](http://www.scdhec.gov/administration/library/CR-009025.pdf)

*This publication provides health information for your general knowledge. Talk to your doctor about your concerns about any medical condition. DHEC does not recommend you diagnose or treat yourself for a serious illness.*

**Notes:**











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and Environmental Control

[www.scdhec.gov/tat](http://www.scdhec.gov/tat)

SOUTH CAROLINA

Tactics  
Against  
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